

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KARACHI 1469

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PK

SUBJECT: STUDENTS KIDNAP MINISTER

REF: KARACHI 1055

SUMMARY: DISGRUNTLED SINDHI-SPEAKING (AND POSSIBLY URDU-SPEAKING) HYDERABAD STUDENTS BLOCKED THE SUPER-HIGHWAY JULY 14 AND KIDNAPPED UNPOPULAR PROVINCIAL TRANSPORT MINISTER ZAIDI, AN URDU-SPEAKING HYDERABAD "MUHAJIR". (SEE REFTTEL FOR BACKGROUND OF SINDHI - "MUHAJIR" ANTAGONISM.) DESPITE THE PROVINCIAL CHIEF MINISTER'S INTERVENTION, A POLICE ROUND-UP OF SUSPECT STUDENTS, AND VARIOUS NEGOTIATION ATTEMPTS, ZAIDI WAS RELEASED UNHARMED FORTY HOURS LATER ONLY IN AN APPARENT RESPONSE TO THE CHIEF MINISTER'S PUBLIC THREAT OF "MOST STRINGENT, PUNITIVE ACTION" AGAINST THE KIDNAPPERS. END SUMMARY

1. SINDHI-SPEAKING STUDENTS OF SIND UNIVERSITY AT JAMSHORO AND OF THE AGRICULTURE COLLEGE AT TANDO JAM (BOTH WELL OUTSIDE HYDERABAD) HAVE LONG FELT ALIENATED FROM THE RULING PEOPLE'S PARTY AND THE AUTHORITIES. IN STUDENT ELECTIONS EARLIER THIS YEAR, ISMAEL WASSAN, CANDIDATE OF THE "JIAY SIND" STUDENT FEDERATION AND FOLLOWER OF THE DISSIDENT PROVINCIAL PATRIOT G. M. SYED, HAD BEEN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE SIND UNIVERSITY

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STUDENT UNION. STUDENTS HAD RESENTED THE POST-SHERPAO ASSASSINATION POLICE RAIDS ON THEIR DORMITORIES, FOLLOWING WHICH ARMS

WERE RECOVERED AND MANY STUDENTS WERE JAILED. THE SUBSEQUENT ABRUPT BANNING OF NUMEROUS SINDHI PUBLICATIONS AND SEALING OF SOME LEINTING PRESSES HAD PROVOKED FURTHER RESENTMENT. FOLLOWING PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO'S RECENT ASSERTION IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY THAT THERE WAS NO "SINDHU DESH" MOVEMENT, STUDENTS AT THE AGRICULTURE COLLEGE MET IN EARLY JULY AND PASSED A RESOLUTION ASKING THE GOVERNMENT TO LIFT THE BAN ON THE PERIODICALS, RELEASE THE DETAINED STUDENTS, AND WITHDRAW THE "EXTERNMENT" ORDER AGAINST SYED, UNDER WHICH HE HAS BEEN CONFINED TO HIS HOUSE IN REMOTE VITMAGE SANN SINCE BHUTTO CAME TO POWER. (A QUASI-JUDICIAL COMMISSION HEADED BY HYDERABAD SINDHI PRESS MAGNATE KAZI AKBAR, A RECENT CONVERT TO THE RULING PARTY, HAS IN FACT LIFTED THE BAN ON SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS AND "UNSEALED" EIGHT OF THE TWELVE AFFECTED PRESSES; OF THOSE STILL SEALED, ONE BELONGS TO SYED AND TWO TO HIS SUPPORTERS.) THE SINDHI-SPEAKING STUDENTS THREATENED THE GOVERNMENT WITH UNSPECIFIED "ACTION" IN TEN DAYS IF THEIR DEMANDS WERE NOT MET.

2. URDU-SPEAKING "MUHAJIR" STUDENTS OF HYDERABAD ALSO HAVE THEIR GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THEY RESENT THE ETHNIC/GEOGRAPHIC QUOTA SYSTEM FOR ADMISSION TO HIGHER STUDIES AND TO THE CIVIL SERVICE, WHICH THEY ARGUE DILUTES THE MERIT PRINCIPLE AND FAVORS RURAL SINDHIS. THEY REMAIN DISGRUNTLED OVER THE RIGGED HYDERABAD BY-ELECTION A YEAR AGO IN WHICH BADIUL HASAN ZAIDI, A "MUHAJIR" CANDIDATE OF THE RULING PARTY, WON A SEAT IN THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY OVER A POPULAR CANDIDATE OF THE JAMIAT-UL-ULEMA-E-PAKISTAN (JUP). BLATANT GOVERNMENT FALSIFICATION OF THE ELECTION RETURNS HAD PROVOKED SEVERAL DAYS' RIOTING BY "MUHAJIRS". ZAIDI WAS SOON MADE TRANSPORT MINISTER. BOTH SINDHI AND "MUHAJIR" STUDENTS HAD DEMANDED FROM HIM BETTER BUS SERVICE TO THE TWO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

3. ACCORDING TO HYDERABAD AMERICAN CENTER DIRECTOR QURESHI (THE PRESS REPORTED ALMOST NOTHING), SINDHI STUDENTS BLOCKED THE HYDERABAD-KARACHI SUPER-HIGHWAY NEAR THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN THE MORNING OF JULY 14, COMMANDEERING SEVERAL BUSES. (THE CONGEN POLITICAL LOCAL REPORTS THAT "MUHAJIR" JUP SYMPATHIZERS WERE ALSO INVOLVED.) APPARENTLY BY CHANCE, ZAIDI PASSED BY EN ROUTE TO KARACHI. HE WAS KIDNAPPED AT GUN-POINT BY THE
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AGITATING STUDENTS, WHO PERMITTED HIS FAMILY TO CONTINUE ITS JOURNEY.

4. ON HEARING OF THE INCIDENT, CHIEF MINISTER GHULAM MUSTAFA JATOI DETOURED TO HYDERABAD. SIND EDUCATION MINISTER PYAR ALI ALLANA, ALSO AN ETHNIC SINDHI, WENT THERE AS WELL. QURESHI REPORTED THAT THE STUDENTS REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE WITH THEM, EVEN THOUGH ALLANA OFFERED HIMSELF AS A HOSTAGE FOR ZAIDI. JATOI REPORTEDLY SOUGHT HELP FROM INDEPENDENT PROVINCIAL LEGISLATOR ZAFAR ALI SHAH, A SYED SYMPATHIZER, TO NEGOTIATE ZAIDI'S

RELEASE; WHETHER SHAH ACCEPTED OR PLAYED A POSITIVE ROLE IN HIS
EVENTUAL RELEASE IS UNKNOWN.

5. AT DAWN ON JULY 15, THE POLICE RAIDED STUDENT DORMITORIES,
ARRESTED ABOUT A HUNDRED STUDENTS, AND POSTED A STRONG GUARD
AROUND THE UNIVERSITY, ACCORDING TO QURESHI, WHO ADDED THAT
LATER IN THE MORNING HE HEARD THAT THE AUTHORITIES WERE DEBATING
WHETHER TO CALL IN THE ARMY. JATOI ISSUED A PUBLIC STATEMENT
FROM HYDERABAD GIVING A TERSE DESCRIPTION OF THE INCIDENT AND
URGING ZAIDI'S KIDNAPPERS TO GIVE THEMSELVES UP TO THE
AUTHORITIES. OTHERWISE, HE WARNED, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE
"MOST STRINGENT, PUNITIVE ACTION" AGAINST THEM. HIS STATEMENT
EMPHASIZED THAT THE GOVERNMENT "CANNOT TOLERATE SUCH ACTS OF
HIGH-HANDEDNESS" AND WAS "DETERMINED TO SUPPRESS THEM WITH ALL
ITS MIGHT". JATOI DID NOTE THE STUDENTS' DEMAND FOR BETTER
TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS AND SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONSIDERING
IT.

6. ZAIDI WAS RELEASED UNHARMED AT ABOUT 2:00 AM JULY 16 AND
REACHED KARACHI THAT MORNING. HE LATER TOLD THE PRESS THAT HIS
KIDNAPPERS HAD TAKEN HIM TO AN UNNAMED "DESERTED VILLAGE"
WHERE HE HAD RECEIVED "VERY HUMANE AND CONSIDERATE TREATMENT".
HE DECLINED TO SPECIFY WHETHER HIS KIDNAPPERS BELONGED TO ANY
PARTICULAR GROUP. HE SPECULATED THAT THE LACK OF TRANSPORT
FACILITIES MIGHT HAVE PROVOKED THE INCIDENT. ZAIDI DISMISSED HIS
KIDNAPPING LIGHTLY, SAYING "SUCH INCIDENTS DO SOMETIME OCCUR
IN ONE'S POLITICAL LIFE". HE NOTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS
CONTEMPLATING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST THE CULPRITS (A NOTABLY SOFTER
LINE THAN JATOI'S).

7. COMMENT: OVER THE LAST YEAR, DEVELOPMENTS DESCRIBED
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IN PARAS 1 AND 2 ABOVE HAVE BOTH REFLECTED AND INTENSIFIED
HYDERABAD "MUHAJIR" AND SINDHI RESENTMENT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.
UNLESS HANDLED WITH THE COURTESY AND FINESSE OF WHICH JATOI
ALMOST ALONE AMONG PROVINCIAL RULING PARTY LEADERS IS CAPABLE,
THIS LATEST INCIDENT AND ITS DENOUEMENT MAY WELL PROVOKE
FURTHER DISTURBANCES. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HYDERABAD--TO A
GREATER EXTENT THAN KARACHI--REMAINS THE PROVINCIAL FOCAL POINT
OF DISCONTENT WITH THE PRESENT REGIME.

8. THE USUAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS (INCLUDING POSTING OF ONE
POLICEMAN) CONTINUE AT THE AMERICAN CENTER; THE APPEARANCE OF
A VISITING AMERICAN POET ON CAMPUS, INITIALLY CANCELLED, STILL
TAKE PLACE AS SNBDEDULED AT THE INSTANCE OF THE UNIVERSITY VICE
CHANCELLOR.
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